

Refugee Youth & Employment



Centre for
Youth & Society  UVic

Work is often seen as an opportunity for personal development, a way of expressing gratitude to the host community, or as a support for family, all of which contribute to high employment aspirations.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

❑ A strength-based approach acknowledges that refugee youth have valuable skills and experiences, and uses these skills and experiences as a foundation for further education and training.

❑ A holistic approach to employment needs includes such services as family counselling, cultural orientation programs, language learning programs, skill-development spaces and opportunities, and other comprehensive programs that support the emotional and personal development of refugee youth.

❑ There are benefits and drawbacks to both work-first and life-first approaches. A work-first approach emphasizes short term employment outcomes which can be helpful for satisfying immediate necessities such as housing and food security. In contrast, a life-first approach encourages youth to explore their career possibilities, reflecting on their identities, skills and talents, hopes, fears, and goals. An integrated approach combines both.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The overall integration and long term employment outcomes of refugee youth are greatly impacted by the support they receive during their first years of resettlement.

KEY POINTS

❑ Refugees and other immigrants, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, are at greater risk for unemployment and often hold economically disadvantaged positions, have fewer employment possibilities and lack access to employment services.

❑ Successful programs holistically address areas that are both directly (e.g. education, skill development, language training) and indirectly (e.g. housing, healthcare, self-esteem) related to employment outcomes.

❑ Employment programs should take into account both the short term and long term employment needs of refugee youth and their families.

Meaningful employment matches a person's qualifications, skills, and talents, and is compensated fairly and adequately.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

❑ Disruption or a lack of access to formal education, exposure to violence, forced displacement, and multiple losses during pre-migration impact refugee youths' ability to find employment later on.

❑ Post-migration challenges include: financial impoverishment, insufficient access to education and employment training, lack of support for families, insufficient housing, low language proficiency, substandard or insufficient access to healthcare, emotional stressors, and navigating a new socio-political system.

❑ When family members are resettled together and adult family members are able to understand local education and employment contexts, youth employment trajectories improve.

This research was supported by UN-Habitat Youth and Livelihoods Unit and the Centre for Youth and Society, University of Victoria, Canada.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

❑ Discrimination, both at the personal and the institutional level, have an impact on employment success. Communities and employers can develop strategies, using national and international guidelines (such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights), for addressing racial bias and discrimination in hiring processes and in the provision of services.

❑ Communities should take into account the financial aspects of meeting these complex needs and discuss the possibility of implementing partially-funded or even fully-funded language programs, apprenticeships, and other employment training opportunities.

❑ Helping refugee youth and their families satisfy more urgent needs, such as food, housing, healthcare, financial support, social integration, and education and career training, provides a greater opportunity for youth to focus on pursuing their long term career goals.

An integrated work-first/life-first approach to employment helps youth satisfy immediate necessities such as housing, food security, and healthcare, while improving access to career training and personal development opportunities.